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CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY.

BY HIS EMINENCE, CARDINAL GIBBONS.

ONE of the most ancient images of the Christian Church is that of a ship tossed about on the waves, yet never sinking. This image was painted more than once on the walls of the Roman Catacombs, precisely when it seemed as if Christianity could not possibly hold out much longer against the impact of social and juridical forces that had sworn its extermination. Nevertheless, the Fisherman of Galilee, with his brethren, survived this first great hurricane of opposition, and planted the victorious symbol of the new religion on the Capitol and the Palatine—over the shrine of Roman religion, and amid the councils of the Roman state. On the morrow of this first great reckoning of the new spirit in mankind with the old established forms of belief and government, a tremor of astonishment seized on the priests and philosophers of the pagan world, that an obscure Syrian sect should have at last lifted a triumphant head. It seemed as though all the *criteria* of mankind—common sense, logic, reason, history, analogy—were at once and hopelessly shattered, and a wonder-world set up in the place of the familiar realities of society. It is an old story how the few remaining pagans hoped against hope, until they saw the fall of the whole fabric of Western civilization, and the figure of a Universal Church interposed between organized society and the elemental forces of barbarism that threatened it from the North and East. In those all-embracing arms, the world of Greece and Rome, that thought to perish doubly, was firmly seized and made to live again.

Since that day, Christianity has dominated all modern history. Its morality, based on the loving kindness of an Eternal Father and the mystic brotherhood with the God-Man, has renovated the face of the earth. It has set firmly the corner-stone for all future

civilization, the conviction of a common humanity that has been deeply rooted in us by no stoicism, but by the story of Jesus Christ and by the lives and deaths of countless Christian men and women. It has clarified at once the sense of sin and the reasons for hope. It has touched the deepest springs of efficient conviction; preached successfully, in season and out of season, of mercy and justice and peace; affected intimately every function of domestic life; thrown a sheltering veil of sanctity about maid and mother and home; stood out against the fierce ambitions and illicit loves of rulers, and the low passions of the multitude. It has healed and cleansed whole legislations, and "filled out with a vivifying spirit" the noble but inorganic letter of great maxims that a Seneca or an Epictetus might utter, but could not cause to live. It has distinctly raised the social and civil life of all civilized humankind. It bears within itself the antidote of a certain divine presence, whereby it overcomes forever those germs of decay and change that cause the death of all other societies. Its earliest writers and exponents had a subtle sense of its true character, when they took over from paganism, and applied to the work of Jesus, the symbolic myth of the phoenix, emblem of a native, organic and indestructible vitality.

If we believe the eminent statistician, Mr. Michael G. Mulhall, the population of the world in 1898 was 1,450 millions. Of these, 764,500,000 were yet pagans, nearly all located in Asia (667,800,000) and in Africa (91,000,000). In Europe, there are none who can be officially described as pagans; in Oceanica there are 4,400,000, and in America, 1,300,000. Therefore, on its oldest and most favorable field, the only tenable forms of paganism have gone down absolutely before the shining of Christian truth, a symbol of what we may hope for in the future over the two continents yet addicted to paganism. The Christians of the world number 501,600,000, of whom 348,500,000 belong to Europe, 126,400,000 to America, with a scattering of 12,600,000 in Asia, 4,400,000 in Africa, 9,700,000 in Oceanica. That is, the most enlightened and progressive portion of the Old World, Europe, with its noble adult daughter in the New World, is still entirely Christian, after nearly sixteen centuries of external struggle against the forces of barbarism and Islam, and internal struggles of the deepest and most momentous nature. As the future of humanity rests henceforth in the hands of the men who

guide, politically and intellectually, the society of Europe and the New World of North and South America, I cannot but see in this distribution and preponderance of the Christian masses an omen of great hopefulness for the future of the religion of Jesus Christ. I know that there is not now that absolute unity of the Christian multitudes that once existed and is yet the necessary, indispensable, ideal condition of that religion. I shall come directly to this fundamental point. But I feel justified in believing that, among these five hundred millions of Christians, there are rough, imperfect, unfinished unities of tradition, practice and spirit; that they all look up to the Son of Mary as the Redeemer of Humanity; that He marks for them the true line of delimitation between the Old and the New; that in and through Him is the firm bond of union that holds us all to a common Father, a Giver of all good things, and a purifying, inflaming Spirit, that acts in a manifold but mystic manner on all who have in any way confessed that Jesus Christ is True God and True Man.

Were this unity perfect among Christians, there can be no doubt that long since the whole world would have been won over to the Gospel of Jesus, that its sweet influences would have transmuted all the hardness and imperfections of our common humanity, by lifting us all into that higher spiritual sphere of brotherhood with the Redeemer of our souls, and sonship with the Head of our race. It is this lack of unity among Christians that makes it even possible for any other religion, old or new, to set up a comparison with it, to challenge its immortal titles to admiration and acceptance. For lack of unity, the impact of the missionary labors is broken, and the incredible sacrifices of Christian men and women must be repeated, often in vain, from generation to generation. This defect of our Christianity it is which enables the savage man, as well as the man of a foreign culture, to escape the arguments and appeals of the Christian apostle. It also renders almost nugatory the efforts of Christianity, on its original soil, to dominate even the most tangible forces of the world and the devil.

The life and teaching of Jesus Christ Himself have nothing but victories to chronicle since His appearance among men. Every century is a new campaign from which He returns to the Heavenly Father, crowned with innumerable laurels, and leading captive innumerable multitudes of human souls. The records of history

are full of the most astonishing conquests by Him of individual souls, voluntary submissions to the irresistible charm of the Son of Man. There is no altitude of intellect so towering that it has not bent before Him, no seat of power so high that it has not done homage to Him. Philosophy and Criticism, History and the Natural Sciences, have sent over to Him, without ceasing, their noblest worthies as pledges of victory. To go no farther back than the century just elapsed, we may say that every page of its annals is bright with the illustrious names of great men who have been proud to confess the Divinity of Jesus. Some of them never knew a wavering of allegiance; others came back to Him by a kind of postliminary process, having learned by hard experience the truth of the apostolic cry of Saint Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."* From this point of view, there is never any diminution of the work of Jesus Christ. His benign and gracious figure dominates forever all life and society. Scarcely, indeed, was He known to the world when we are told that He won the personal admiration of great Roman emperors like Tiberius and Hadrian and Alexander Severus. Sweet legends of the veneration of an Augustus and an Abgar cling forever to His person—symbols of that constant self-surrender in love and adoration which has gone on since then, and will cease no more.

What is the secret of this constant and cosmopolitan devotion to Jesus? From what deep springs of history and human nature do the forces flow that keep it forever alive, in spite of the multitudinous accidents of time and space and change that affect so thoroughly all other phenomena of life? *Securus judicat orbis terrarum*. It can be no slight bond that holds forever such elastic and elusive forces as the minds and hearts of men, in varying epochs and lands, periods, forms and degrees of culture. To all Catholics, it is as simple as the sun that shines in the heavens, or as the air we breathe.

To us, the religion of Jesus Christ—for we maintain, on the authority of the gospels, that He founded a religion—is no vague resultant of world-forces that found their proper time and suitable expression in the Son of Mary. Indeed, the first great domestic struggle of the new religion was against just those loose, nuclear forces of Gnosticism and Eclecticism that desired to fasten their

*John vi., 68.

dying causes to the vigorous young body of Christian Faith, but which she repelled with clear consciousness of their desire and of her repugnance. To us, Christianity is no philosophy, however elevated and potent, but a divine thing in the sense of an immediate, positive revelation. Hence, in its earliest documents, it is known as "The Name," "The Work," "The Manifestation" of an Omnipotent Divine Will, the closest and sublimest bond that can unite the Divinity with mankind. From among the philosophers of the world, there could never come a Redeemer. And this is precisely what we welcome in Jesus Christ, the figure and the office of a Divine Atoner for the sins of the world, the Saviour of mankind from the inherited and actual burden of sin.

Hence it is that Christianity is the most intensely personal of all religions. It presumes, as no other, the unwavering belief in and concern for an immortal and responsible individual soul, the confession of an Omniscient and All-Just Judge, a known and possible code of conduct, and a clearly-apprehended sanction that waits upon the violation or neglect of that code. The ideal of the individual Christian is the Imitation of Jesus Christ, "the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature, * * * * * the head of all principality and power * * * * * for in Him dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead corporally."* And, inasmuch as He realizes in His own person and circle of influence this sublime model, Christianity may be said to live or die for Him.

But how shall the individual follower of Jesus know His will, and, knowing it, follow it perfectly? For this purpose, Jesus formed a visible society, destined to embrace all who would accept Him as God and Master. He gave it the power to reproduce and continue itself, and conveyed to it the custody of His teaching and the example of His life, with vicarious authority to interpret both in time of need, and to decide with finality. To its court of appeal, He indicated not only the letter but the spirit of its procedure. He assured this society of His helpful presence forever, and also of the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit. He foretold for it a career of great trial and sorrow, but also foreshadowed for it periods of triumph and glory. But, above all, He imposed on it the absolute condition of Unity. This is evident, not only from all His devices of constitution and description throughout the gospels, but, in a very particular manner, from the

*Coloss., i., 15; ii., 9, 10.

great lyrical, almost dithyrambic, monologue in which, on the eve of His Atonement, He pours forth the very soul of prayer to the Heavenly Father.* Here the underlying *motif* is Unity, that shadow of the Divine Life, the condition of the new sanctity, the mark and proof of genuine Christianity:

"And not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in me:

That they all may be one, as thou, Father, in me, and I in thee: that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

And the glory which thou hast given me, I have given to them: that they may be one, as we also are one."

Elsewhere, He insists that there shall be one fold and one shepherd, that whoever gathers not with Him scattereth, that whoever receives His disciples "receives me and Him who sent me." There can be no doubt, then, as to an effective will of Jesus that this society should be one to the end of time, and among all kinds and conditions of men. It was also to be holy and stainless, imperishable and all-glorious, self-identical and self-witnessing; but the note of unity predominates throughout. His prophetic soul forecasts and denounces every attempt to rend this unity, as the chief obstacle to the success of His life and teaching among men, as the great stumbling block, the creators of which He will hold eminently responsible in the last great accounting.

Now, when we enter upon the last century of the mystic cycle of two thousand years during which the gospel of Jesus has been preached, principally by and through this society which is His Holy Church,† we seize with a terrible earnestness and directness the meaning of Christ's language about unity. Just as that note dominates all others in the gospels, so does its infringement or diminution dominate the history of His Church, the public propagation of His saving and consoling teachings. The avowedly anti-Christian forces of the past two centuries could never have scored their triumphs were it not for the mighty cleft that divided Protestant from Catholic Christendom. While conflict ran high as to the points on which they differed, the enemy was pillaging such parts of the original estate as they yet held in common. The Christian Church was, truly, the mother of all modern happiness and liberty; yet a minority of rebels or apostates was allowed

*John, xvii., 20-23.

†Eph., v., 27.

to set aside her claims, to contaminate all the sources of public and private education, to enlist against her the literature and the arts that she had saved and cherished in a night of storm and disaster. And all this, because centuries of unhappy division had accustomed both Catholics and Protestants to look to one another only for suspicion and coldness and uncharity. Truly, the divine eye of Jesus saw well through the ages, and what He saw could only have intensified His will to base His Church upon a rock of unity that could not be overthrown. Could we restore to-day the former unity of all Christian peoples, with what ease we could look forth to the lifting of China to the highest plane of Christian welfare and culture! Could we be once more as in the fifteenth century, with what ease could the gospel of the Prince of Peace be preached throughout Africa from the lips of united brethren, and not amid the horrors of injustice and war that are leaving their ominous, red tracks across every newly opened land! So, too, if there were again the old-time unity of East and West, what a quickening there could be of the slumbering forces of the Greek Church, and what a useful race the Coptic Christians would be for the evangelization of Darkest Africa! Whatever way we look, the functions of Unity seem so great and valuable that all the reasons which in the past operated to destroy it are pushed into the background, as no longer worthy of consideration. Indeed, as time wears on, and men take a broader and more philosophic view of things, it will be seen that each individual schism or heresy was less necessary or justifiable, in the light of the magnificent horizon of possible efforts and enterprises that is now dawning upon us, but to which we are unable to reach by reason of our lack of thorough and durable unity. Can any genuine Christian contemplate with equanimity the sad results that the Monophysitism of the fifth and sixth centuries has entailed upon the Churches of the Orient by its substantial contribution to the success of Islam, and thereby upon all Christian society, mediæval and modern? There is in all such cases an encysting of the general Christian spirit and strength, a gradual hardening and crystallizing of all those currents of enthusiasm and daring that once poured in from the great main flow of Christian grace, a steady uplifting of walls of separation that can only render more narrow, if in some cases more deep and intense, the tides of Christian life, thought, endeavor.

To the Catholic, the Unity of the Church, that especial desire of Jesus Christ, is based upon the Rock of Peter. He finds the reasons for his belief in the Petrine headship of the Apostolic College, in the special promises and privileges accorded to Peter by Our Lord, in the peculiar activity of Peter and the pre-eminence that he obtains in the inspired records of primitive Christian life. No other See than that of Peter ever laid claim to a hegemony over Christianity, while, from the earliest days, that See claimed this supreme ascendancy. The last chapters of St. Clement's epistle to the Corinthians (*circa* A. D., 96), the almost contemporary epistle of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Romans, the famous description by St. Irenaeus of the Roman Church as the oldest, greatest, most glorious and most authoritative of all the apostolic churches, are only a few among many indications of the right of supreme leadership that archaic Christian society adjudged to the See of Rome.

Doubtless, in the infancy of Christendom, this supremacy was chiefly visible in the mystic pomp of martyrdom and the organized services of charity. But it was an organic and native right, and could therefore adapt itself, as it did, to all the actual needs of Christian society, as they developed from internal growth or under pressure from without. The little pseudo-Cyprian tract, "Against Gamesters," is an index that, before Constantine, they claimed to rule by the "Power of the Keys." In its spirit, this very ancient discourse of a Roman Bishop does not differ from any formula of Leo the Great. Yet Eusebius is guaranty that this power was chiefly exercised over the churches by acts of charity that extended from the apostolic times down to his own day. I need not rehearse the functions of Rome at a later period, in repressing the most disruptive, anti-Christian heresies, in the conversion and instruction of the barbarians, in the formation of their rulers and their laws, in the uplifting and idealizing of the incipient national lives of France, Germany, England and Spain. Writing in 1808, Tobler could say that, without the Papacy, there would not have remained in the world any universal religion, faith would have entirely disappeared. And the contemporary Swiss historian, the great Johann von Müller, could write that their paternal hands held up bravely the whole hierarchy, and at the same time preserved the liberty of all the states of Europe. "It was the Pope who restrained and governed, by means of the

principles of religion and the fear of God, the bold, unbridled youth of our modern States." The Gregories, Alexanders and Innocents of the Middle Ages were, indeed, as a wall against the torrent of absolutism that then threatened to invade the whole earth. If, in the weakness of mediæval, popular organization, the insidious despotism of the Orient failed to prevail in the courts of the West, it was because the violent and lascivious nobles were forever held in check by the fear or the respect of him who sat in the Chair of Peter. And, when the awful cataclysm of the Reformation took place, it was still the insight, genius and energy of Rome that kept intact a solid phalanx of Catholicism, through all the defections and apostasies of a century.

The average non-Catholic does not easily seize the point of view from which the Roman Catholic looks on the Pope. To us, he is the divinely-appointed High Court of Appeals of Christendom, the "*Dominus Apostolicus*" or living embodiment of the supreme, vicarious authority of the Apostolic College. Hence, we measure the progress or decay of the Christian cause and interest, very largely, by the condition of the Roman See. It is for us the working heart of Christendom. And the words of affection and veneration that we use when speaking of it we believe to be justified by its eminently paternal character and spirit, its origin, its age, its manifold experience, its countless services to the virtuous and the oppressed, its supra-national functions. For its sake, we have imitated the *Geux* of Holland, and converted a title of reproach into a title of distinction. Every Catholic bishop knows, by history and by instinct, that his strength and dignity are dependent on the strength and dignity of the Pope. And the latter knows, in turn, that his first duty is the confirmation of the bishops in faith and enthusiasm.*

The last great storm through which our Catholic Christianity has gone was the French Revolution. The brunt of this was borne by the See of Rome. Two Popes, Pius VI. and Pius VII., learned in their own persons what the agony and the glory of martyrdom are like. To their personal courage and independence is very largely owing the recrudescence of Catholic affection for a See which, in these bishops, showed itself truly apostolic. We consider that it is owing to the extreme watchfulness and foresight of the Popes in this century that schism and heresy have

*Luke, xxii., 31, 32.

been so little in evidence. More than one source or cause of these great disruptions has showed itself. But, from whatever quarter the danger threatened, it was conquered by the action of the Apostolic See. In the meantime, the numbers of its adherents have grown with the growth of the world, and may be set down at the opening of the twentieth century as more than one-half of the five hundred millions who bear the name of Christians.* Nowhere, perhaps, is this phenomenal growth more noticeable than among the English-speaking peoples. From the most insignificant place in the statistics of Catholicism, they have come in this century to count nearly two hundred and fifty bishops, in a total of less than one thousand; and, from a handful of believers outside of Ireland, to be more than twenty-one millions, with over twenty-one thousand priests and more than eighteen thousand churches.†

To this large and compact body, habituated to look on Christianity as a living organism of which they are integrant parts, the Pope represents all the counsel, experience, sympathy, glory, and also the sufferings of the past. No other figure in the modern world so rouses the hearts of men as the venerable bishop who dwells in the Vatican, the Shepherd of Humanity, the only voice that to-day, in the midst of universal religious decay, can speak to all society with an archaic authority, an unparalleled experience and a universal good-will that all must recognize, if they do not obey. His genuine wrongs and sufferings must some day be redressed, for they have an intimate relationship with the wrongs and sufferings that the common people everywhere loudly proclaim that they themselves are compelled to bear. It is an eternally true law of history that any signal violation of justice avenges itself eventually upon all human society, and demands an equally signal reparation.

Catholic students of history and politics agree that there is a remarkable unity of purpose and means, a keenness and direct-

*At the late Australasian Catholic Congress, Mr. Michael G. Mulhall declared that, of the 501,600,000 Christians in the world, 290,000,000 were Roman Catholics.

†In a work lately published by Messrs. Swan & Sonnenschein, of London, I find the following statistics of conversions to Catholicism within fifty years from among the higher classes of English society: "Since 1850," it is there said, "the persons who have gone over to the Church of Rome include 445 graduates of Oxford, 213 of Cambridge, and 63 of other universities, besides 27 peers, 244 military officers, 162 authors, 129 lawyers, and 60 physicians. Among the graduates were 446 clergymen of the Established Church."

ness of vision, in the onslaughts which were made upon the Papacy during the past century, and that ended in the utter destruction of its public status as a civil power. But they know, too, that the peace, happiness and prosperity assured by the doctrinaires and sectaries of the whole century are not yet the lot of that nation which has been built over the grave of the Pope's old and venerable political authority. They rightly suspect, from the analogy of the past, the character of the peoples of the peninsula, and the scope of those who yet detain his political authority, that the measure of the popular sufferings of Italy is not filled up. On the other hand, the peoples of all Europe are threatened with evils of the same nature. The men who sit in the high places of these nations speak with little hope of the near future. Militarism, that has always ended in despotism, and a godless industrialism, that must needs breed popular envy and hatred, lift their heads with pride and assurance of future domination. Again an era of force, cloaked but poorly by a coarse luxury and license, dawns upon the Continental nations, with all its sure subversion of hardly conquered popular rights and liberties, and the equally sure retaliation of the oppressed.

The Roman Catholic is convinced that all these evils which seriously threaten Christian Europe are owing to the popular neglect of the simple and sane principles of the gospel, their quasi-official expulsion from public life, the fatal assumption that there can be a sufficient and working morality without religion and worship—that is, without public recognition of God, as Creator, Father, Provider and Saviour. To him, the symbol of this secular activity is the degradation and humiliation of the one great force that stood publicly and officially for the historic Christian morality. We recognize and welcome those numerous voices from outside our fold that daily join themselves to us in regretting the destruction of a Supreme Moral Tribunal among Christians, that could alone efficiently avert the evils of war, alone persuade whole peoples to a hearty reconciliation. But we listen with greater veneration to those words of Leo XIII., in his late Encyclical on Jesus Christ, in which the august nonagenarian, himself one of the few survivors of the century, points out the dangers of the future and mingles with his warning the words of remedy:

“So great is this struggle of the passions and so serious the dangers involved that we must either anticipate ultimate ruin or seek

for an efficient remedy. It is, of course, both right and necessary to punish malefactors, to educate the masses, and by legislation to prevent crime in every possible way; but all this is by no means sufficient. The salvation of the nations must be looked for higher. A power greater than human must be called in to teach men's hearts, awaken in them the sense of duty, and make them better. This is the power which once before saved the world from destruction when groaning under much more terrible evils. Once remove all impediments and allow the Christian spirit to revive and grow strong in a nation, and that nation will be healed. The strife between the classes and the masses will die away; mutual rights will be respected. If Christ be listened to, both rich and poor will do their duty. The former will realize that they must observe justice and charity, the latter self-restraint and moderation, if both are to be saved. Domestic life will be firmly established by the salutary fear of God as the law-giver."

The Roman Catholic believes that no teacher of morality that the world knows, or could create, can ever speak a more true and noble language, or emphasize his teaching with greater authority and experience. Every word is coined out of the common Christian treasury of truth, and is received as such by more than one-half of Christendom, not only because it corresponds to the written records of the life of Christ, but because it comes from the mouth of one whom He has set up among us as His authorized witness, exponent and mouth-piece. With equal masterliness, the Pope touches on the original sin of our public life—its rejection of the spirit of Jesus, as manifested in the gospel and the history of Christianity:

"In the same way the precepts of the natural law, which dictates respect for lawful authority and obedience to the laws, will exercise their influence over the people. Seditions and conspiracies will cease. Wherever Christianity rules over all without let or hindrance, there the order established by Divine Providence is preserved, and both security and prosperity are the happy result. The common welfare, then, urgently demands a return to Him from whom we should never have gone astray; to Him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life—and this on the part not only of individuals, but of society as a whole. We must restore Christ to this His own rightful possession. All elements of the national life must be made to drink in the life which proceedeth from Him—legislation, political institutions, education, marriage and family life, capital and labor. Every one must see that the very growth of civilization which is so ardently desired depends greatly upon this, since it is fed and grows not so much by material wealth and prosperity as by the spiritual qualities of morality and virtue."

I am aware that the obstacles in the way of the Unity of Christendom are very great, and that to many minds they seem

hopeless. Nevertheless, it is possible; perhaps, if our prayers were fervent enough, this incalculable boon would be again granted, that we might all own one God, one faith, one baptism. Thereby, we would again bring to bear upon the new life that opens before mankind the benign, regenerating influences of the example and the teachings of Our Lord, but this time with the impact of a common unity. Even Melancthon recognized its necessity; and for many years the theologians of the Reformation were occupied with the bases of such a step as might have been the noblest act of the sixteenth century. The hope clung to life in the hearts of Grotius, Leibnitz, George Calixtus. In the Anglican Church, Laud, and perhaps Ussher, cherished the same desire. It has lived a cryptic life in Oxford, and among a small number of the more spiritual Anglican clergy. Very noble souls, like Ambrose de Lisle Phillips, have given themselves to the furtherance of the ideal. Societies exist in Germany and France for that purpose—societies of prayer, persuasion and example. The Popes have never ceased to solicit officially the wandering families of Christendom to come back within the common fold; and, while the Church cannot sacrifice the truth of her teaching, in all other ways the return would be made easy. She has only deep sorrow and abundant tears for the dissensions of Christendom, knowing well that they are the chief cause of the persecutions it undergoes, the delay of its triumph over the hearts and souls of men, and the rejoicings of its eternal enemies that at last they have fixed the limits of its influence and marked the hour of its downfall and ruin.

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